

George Washington University Student Association

Fee Commission Report

February 2, 2012

Introduction and Purpose

Members of the Board of Trustees:

As a student-led initiative, we in the Student Association established a Fee Commission. The Fee Commission consists of students both affiliated and not affiliated with student government at GW.

The purpose of our Fee Commission is to encourage transparency from the University as it pertains to extra costs to the student body. Through researching several different fees (all of which are in addition to GW tuition) we found that many remain hidden, and that very little information is available as to the reason for the extra cost to students. **We request that the University agree to share all student account and extra charges with the Commission (Student Association) on a semester basis. This initiative is an effort in creating greater awareness of extra charges, and heralds positive implications that greater transparency has for GW students and their families.**

In our detailed report, we chose 10 fees to outline. First we explained the fee and from which office it was levied. Then we explained how the fee affects GW students. A theme throughout this report is that we as students believe not only that the University should pursue transparency with extra fees, but that many of these fees should be included in tuition. By including fees as part of overall tuition, they would be eligible for financial aid. Fees are a flat tax on students, and are not in any way means-tested. As a University committed to exceptional financial aid, we ask that you consider making all fees aid-eligible.

We understand that some fees need to exist to recover costs. We excluded several fees (like lost room key and lost GWorld card fees) as we understand that there is a direct associated cost to the University to provide a replacement. A majority of the fees listed go beyond cost recovery. They exist as additional revenue for certain departments. We oppose the University's profiteering off of hidden costs and fees, and ask that this general policy be changed.

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Study Abroad Fees

Office

Office of Study Abroad

Explanation of Fee

- While abroad for a semester or academic year, students are charged their GW fixed-tuition rate and a study abroad program fee. Study abroad programs are placed into one of four tiers. Programs are placed into tiers by considering the amenities included in the program. For each semester a student is abroad, the following fees are charged to their GW bill:

1. Tier 1 Programs: GW fixed-tuition rate + \$6,150 program fee
2. Tier 2 Programs: GW fixed-tuition rate + \$5,750 program fee
3. Tier 3 Programs: GW fixed-tuition rate + \$5,050 program fee
4. Tier 4 Programs: GW fixed-tuition rate + \$550 program fee

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

Most study-abroad schools have tuition and associated fees of about half of GW's tuition. For example, for an American student to study at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland for one semester, it costs £7,225, or approximately \$11,500. **A GW student however pays \$21,000 in GW tuition plus a \$6,150 program fee. This is exorbitant considering that students are still forced to pay for flights, housing, and food costs out of pocket.**

Additional Information

Full tuition, without the additional program fee, is sufficient to cover the University's expenses, considering that students are attending schools with costs significantly lower than GW's current pricing model.

18th Credit Fee

Office

Office of the Registrar

Explanation of Fee

Undergraduates taking more than 17 hours (19 for SEAS students) per semester are charged at the per credit hour rate then in effect for each credit hour exceeding that limit. For example this year a freshman student would pay an additional \$1,226.50 in tuition by taking an 18th credit. Furthermore, if a student decides to drop a class putting him/her above the 17/19 credit limit, the charge is not fully refunded; instead, it is pro-rated based on when the extra credits were dropped (after 4 weeks, there is no refund).

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

This policy is a strong deterrent for students aiming to take a for-credit internship off-campus to supplement their academic workload. Students, in effect, pay to intern. With

the exception of processing the paperwork to add the additional course and a supervisor to ensure they are on the right path, there is no direct cost to the university associated with the off-campus internship; however, a charge is made to the student of \$1,226.50 per additional credit. This is on top of the additional costs associated with an internship, such as traveling to and from the internship.

Additional Information

Students who choose not to receive credit for their internship still incur charges if they wish to have it included on their transcript. For instance, undergraduates in the Business school have to fill out a Business Internship Experience Contract (zero credit) and incur a \$25 charge to the Registrar's Office. While this alternative is preferable to paying over \$1,000 to include a for-credit internship, it is still an additional fee on students for something with nearly negligible cost to GW.

Housing Cancellation Fee

Office

Center for Student Engagement

Explanation of Fee

The housing cancellation fee affects juniors and seniors who sign up for the GW Housing assignment process, but then decide to cancel and live off campus after assignments are made. Within five days of assignment, the **cancellation fee is \$350; the fee then rises to \$700.**

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

Students who move off campus often do so for financial reasons – it is often cheaper to live off-campus than on-campus. A \$350-\$700 fee could translate to a half-month's rent, a significant amount of money translating to a 5% increase in the cost of housing. Many students cannot afford to pay such an exorbitant fee when they are simply trying to find the best housing options available to them.

Additional Information

In our view, the housing cancellation fee is unfair. The housing website offers no explanation for why the fee is in place or how the value of the fee was determined. We assume the fee is set up to deter students from needlessly signing up for housing. We assume that the administration will argue that when students sign up for housing and do not end up using the room, they complicate the housing assignment process. While the premise of the fee makes some sense, its substantial amount does not. Why \$350 and \$700? Furthermore, there should be a difference made between someone assigned their first-choice housing assignment versus someone who wasn't assigned the type of room they listed as a preference (e.g. being assigned a triple when only singles were requested). While it wouldn't be reasonable to expect everyone to get one of their top three housing choices, it would be reasonable not to charge students a large fee when they decline a housing assignment that was not a preference.

Academic Fees

Office

Various Academic Departments

Explanation of Fee

Some academic departments levy a fee for some of their courses, often without explanation of the purpose of the fee.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

Several academic departments levy fees for taking certain classes. The fee is listed, but an explanation for why the fee is being charged is not uniformly available. The basic sciences (Biological Sciences, Chemistry, and Physics) all charge fees. Biological Sciences charges a \$55 fee for non-majors, while more advanced classes have an \$85 fee. Chemistry does not charge for non-major courses, but higher-level courses carry a \$75 fee. Introduction to

Physics charges a \$70 fee. In those cases, the fee is to cover laboratory expenses. As a one-time fee, these would not likely deter a student from a course; however, for students within the major, these fees add up to hundreds of dollars in additional costs for required courses.

- Other science departments have fees associated with their courses, presumably to cover lab costs as well. Exercise Science charges \$40 to take Anatomy & Physiology and Injury Assessment. Athletic Training majors are charged \$25 per course. Geology charges a \$50 fee on some of its upper level courses. Some Geography courses carry a \$30 fee.
- The language departments uniformly charge \$60 in fees (excepting Portuguese, which charges \$50). The fee covers computer costs associated with online activities. However, several students report never engaging in online activities using the university's computers. In essence, many students may be paying an extra fee for something they never use. Considering the graduation requirement (for CCAS, ESIA, and SPHHS) includes at least two semesters of a foreign language, this results in \$120 in unavoidable fees.
- Theatre and Dance charges \$15 for all classes (excluding Understanding the Dance). There is no apparent explanation for the fee. Students taking Introduction to Acting reported that they were not provided any additional course materials (other than some photocopies) that would have explained the fee. Furthermore, the TRDA course "Production Design" charges a \$100 lab fee, which is higher than any of the natural sciences.

Additional Information

While fees for some courses, particularly the sciences requiring lab time, are easily understandable, fees on some courses in the TRDA department might not be. We ask that the University specifically explain what the income for each course fee will be used to pay for in the bulletin along with the course description.

UPD Fee

Office

University Police Department

Explanation of Fee

The fee is a mandatory \$200 expense for student organizations putting on events that meet the University's specified requirements for a uniformed police presence. Most of these events take place in the Marvin Center.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

This fee reduces the amount of programming that may be sponsored by the Student Association by pre-allocating a large percentage to cover UPD costs. Student groups often have a budget for the year that is \$1,000 or less. UPD fees put a substantial drain on student organizations that wish to hold a medium-scale public event (beyond simple private meetings and get-togethers). Most groups seek co-sponsorship funding from the SA to cover these costs. **The SA's budget stems directly from the "student activity fee," and should be reserved for just that, "student activities", not university-mandated expenses.** Effectively, the University bestows a large sum of money on the SA only for that money to be channeled back towards a University department. **The fee amounts to a tax by the University on our student activity fee contributions.** Of the money we receive every year, a relatively consistent portion is given back to the University via this fee.

Additional Information

We understand and accept that there is a contractual obligation for the University to guarantee a certain quantity of revenue to UPD for Marvin Center events. We therefore are not proposing that the fee be eliminated; we simply propose that student organizations not be liable for these expenses. For most of these events, a UPD presence is not wanted or needed by the student organization, but is required for the event to take place. In these situations in particular, it makes no sense for student organizations to pay for a service from a department that is contractually bound to the University, and not to the individual student organization. UPD's already scheduled rounds should suffice as security, especially in the Marvin Center.

Technology Fees

Office

Events and Venues

Explanation of Fee

This fee is intended to cover the cost to the University when student organizations are allowed use certain audio and visual equipment. This equipment includes (but is not limited to) projectors, microphones, computers, and adapters.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

Technology fees trickle down from student organizations, and students face them as dues or attendance fees. The rental rates appear to be more profit-driven rather than cost covering. The high rate of these fees limits some organizations from holding certain events that they would like to. Replacement fees for damaged or ruined technology are reasonable. In addition, fees are charged for equipment already in-place in a room (such as a built-in projector or microphone), which requires no effort on the part of event staff to set it up.

Additional Information

Technology fees do not apply to student organization events held within the Marvin Center. Students are not allowed to rent laptops.

Transcript Fees

Office

Office of the Registrar

Explanation of Fee

The Office of the Registrar charges student \$10 for a transcript on-site at the office, and \$5 to send it through the mail on request.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

Like the recently eliminated graduation fee, this fee leaves GW student feeling nicked and dimed as they leave the University. While the fee may be intended to recover material (paper) costs, \$10 is clearly excessive for an item that every college graduate will eventually need.

Health and Wellness Fee

Office

Office of Academic and Student Support Services

Explanation of Fee

Towel use at the Lerner Health and Wellness Center cost 75 cents. This cost has increased 200% over the past year.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

This fee for essentially borrowing a towel for an hour far exceeds the cost of laundering it.

Additional Information

While this cost may seem diminutive, it adds up quickly for students who work out regularly. GW promotes health as a mainstay in our community. We oppose the systematic profiteering off of a basic gym necessity. Instead of leaving the gym refreshed and relaxed, many students become frustrated with an above-cost fee.

Printing Fee

Office

Academic Technologies

Explanation of Fee

For all Academic Technologies printers (including those in Gelman, Eckles and Burns libraries), students pay seven-cent per-side fees for copying and printing. The fee is intended to

offset the costs of printing to the University as well as to deter waste. Over the past decade, the fee was initiated and grew to 9 cents. As of 2012, the cost of printing is 7 cents.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

GW students who do not have personal printers exclusively use printers in GW libraries. Since the cost of printing is not factored into tuition, printing fees account for a significant additional expense to students. This expense is not eligible for financial aid.

Additional Information

As GW campus moves to tablet use and going paperless, and more professors use online submission for assignments, overall printing will likely decrease. In addition, GW administrators have agreed to look at different contract proposals as the current contract expires within the next academic year.

Student Health Fees

Office

Student Health Services

Explanation of Fee

Automatic charge of \$25 for a visit to Student Health Services.

How Does This Fee Affect Students?

This comparatively low fee allows students to access medical help with a very low barrier to entry.

Additional Information

As a Commission, we find this fee to be among the most reasonable. We ask that the University not raise this fee in the future, as an increase may cause a deterrent to seeking help.